

Wadi Climbing: Quiet Resistance in the West Bank

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Abstract: Palestinian rock climbers in the West Bank ascend towering limestone cliffs despite being forcibly dispossessed and targeted by Israeli military and violent settlers. This paper examines their actions from the perspective of Quiet Resistance – a form of resistance where one is motivated by personal reasons to pursue activities that are obstructed by oppression. I explain what Quiet Resistance is, how it differs from political protest, and what makes it distinctively valuable. Then, I explain how Quiet Resistance allows the Palestinian climbers to maintain sources of meaning in life under oppressive circumstances. Further, as a form of symbolic action, it allows the climbers to forge a profound connection to their rightful land.

1. Meet The Wadi Climbers

Palestinians have been engaged in nonviolent resistance to Zionism since the beginning of the Israeli Occupation in 1948.¹ The most well-known example is the Boycotts, Divestments, and Sanctions Movement (BDS) which was created in 2001 to exert global economic pressure on Israel to end the occupation and allow displaced Palestinians to return home. Another example is the Gaza Great March of Return, a series of demonstrations held every Friday in 2018-2019 to demand the end of Israel's land, air, and sea blockade of the Gaza strip. Perhaps the oldest form of Palestinian nonviolent resistance is known as *sumud* (or steadfastness), which encompasses a wide range of practices aimed at Palestinian perseverance and self-preservation. Examples of *sumud* have included farmers refusing to leave their crops despite the imposition of physical barricades, building and rebuilding homes after repeated demolitions, and economic projects that strengthen Palestinian self-reliance. Along with such actions, Palestinians have been engaged in what I will

¹ Which is not to say that *all* Palestinian resistance has been nonviolent. For examples of armed Palestinian resistance consider especially the TWA Flight 840 hijacking led by Leila Khaled in 1969, and the First and Second Intifadas, which occurred between 1987-1993 and 2000-2005 respectively.

be calling *Quiet Resistance*. This paper is about a particular kind of Quiet Resistance that has recently gained popularity in the West Bank.²

Despite decades of Israeli military occupation, land confiscation, dispossession, and a complex system of geo-political segregation, Palestine is home to a grassroots rock-climbing scene.³ Wadi Climbing, the West Bank's first indoor climbing gym, has been bolting outdoor routes and organizing trips to the region's spectacular limestone cliffs since 2014. Their crags feature projects that range from moderate to advanced and have increased the local community's interest in climbing exponentially. Excursions attract people from a wide range of genders, religions, and class identities, including members of the Bedouin shepherding community, Palestine's most marginalized ethnic group.

Palestinian climbers must navigate difficult political terrain to pursue their sport. Palestinians often cannot use the same roads as foreigners or Israelis, even in areas that are recognized as part of Palestine by international law. Cliffs near illegal settlements cannot be accessed directly without a foreign or Israeli passport. To access Ain Fara, for example, Palestinians must park their vehicles an hour away and take a dirt path skirting the barbed wire fence around the periphery of the Almon settlement. Information about the routes in the new guidebook, *Climbing Palestine*, includes instructions on how to get there safely depending on your nationality (sometimes offering three different driving directions) and warnings for areas where climbers may encounter armed Israeli settlers or military personnel.

It is not uncommon for Palestinian climbers to be surveilled, harassed, assaulted, or even detained on excursions. In 2019, a group of Palestinian climbers setting up camp at a West Bank crag were hit with flares and surrounded by a dozen Israeli Defense (IDF) soldiers dressed in full combat fatigues and carrying M4 assault rifles. Refusing to provide a reason or warrant, the soldiers took the climbers' IDs, commanded them to sit on the ground, and forced them to pose for mugshots. Then, the climbers were marched back down the valley at gunpoint. As the founder of Wadi Climbing put it, "the bleak reality of Palestinian life under Israeli military occupation is that

² Some acts of Quiet Resistance may be forms of *sumud*. As will become clearer, however, not all cases of *sumud* count as Quiet Resistance. *Sumud* is a broad category which allows for a greater range of motivations than are captured in Quiet Resistance. Where the motivations of Quiet Resistance are essentially personal, the motivations of *sumud* may include personal reasons as well as reasons of justice.

³ Purtell, "Palestine's West Bank Is Becoming a Climbing Hub".

there is not a single place my friends could have gone that would have been guaranteed safe from this brand of harassment. In fact, it easily could've been worse".⁴

When asked why they climb, given the real possibility of being targeted by Israeli Defense Forces, members of the Wadi Climbing community emphasize their love of the sport and the unique experiences it provides them. "It's fucking fun!", they exclaim. "I love climbing", "it's the most amazing thing that has happened to me in the last five years", "it's just very good for me and my heart".⁵ "Living in a place like Palestine, you really need these moments where you can feel free", "focus on the now, just distract yourself and free your mind".⁶

2. The Plan

Resistance to oppression typically evokes images of picket lines and crowds of protesters demanding large-scale political change. As feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial philosophers have long recognized, however, the effects of oppression are varied and wide-ranging, and there are many ways to resist them.⁷ Not all resistance aims to send a public message or achieve political aims.⁸ This paper examines Quiet Resistance, the form of resistance that the Wadi Climbers are engaged in. In Section 3, I explain what Quiet Resistance is and differentiate it from protest and civil disobedience. Quiet Resistance is the pursuit of activities that are obstructed by oppression. It is characteristically undertaken for personal reasons as opposed to reasons of justice. When explaining why they resist, Quiet Resisters typically cite their love for the activity or features about it that make it valuable to them for its own sake despite the costs of pursuing it. Quiet Resistance is "quiet" only because, unlike paradigms of protest and civil disobedience, it is not intended as a mode of public address. Quiet Resisters are primarily interested in pursuing their personal project, rather than asserting any deeply held moral convictions.⁹ After explaining the characteristic

⁴ Burns, "Why Palestinians Can't Climb Free".

⁵ Bisharat. "Resistance Climbing". This film is now available to stream for free on *Reel Rock*.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ For further discussion of the varieties of resistance see, Fakhoury, "Eight Dimensions of Resistance", Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*, Harvey, "Victims, Resistance, and Civilized Oppression" and Hay, *Kantianism, Liberalism, and Feminism*.

⁸ Fakhoury, "Eight Dimensions of Resistance".

⁹ When I say that Quiet Resisters do not assert their moral convictions, I use the word "assert" in a very literal sense. Their resistance does not consist of speech-acts in which they explicitly state their moral beliefs. This is not to say, however, that onlookers could not interpret their behavior and infer certain moral convictions from their observations.

features of Quiet Resistance, I turn to the question of its normative status. In Section 4, I consider the value of Quiet Resistance as a form of direct action and symbolic action. As a form of direct action, Quiet Resistance may weaken oppressive norms, raise consciousness, and allow those who engage in it to maintain sources of meaning in life. As a form of symbolic action, Quiet Resistance may exhibit different values, including a certain kind of self-respect. For the most part, its symbolic significance will be highly particular to the case. In our central example, Quiet Resistance is a means of symbolically reconnecting Palestinians with their rightful land. That is, the Wadi Climbers symbolically repossess their land by climbing it.

Quiet Resistance remains an underexplored topic in contemporary ethics and political philosophy. While philosophers agree that resistance comes in many different forms, discussions tend to pay special attention to actions with overtly political aims.¹⁰ There is a large literature, for example, about varieties of protest and civil disobedience.¹¹ Relatively little has been said about the more quotidian ways that victims can (and do) resist, such as by engaging in Quiet Resistance.¹² An ethics of resistance is incomplete without considering these methods. An ethics of resistance that includes Quiet Resistance allows for a better understanding of how oppression and resistance play out at the individual level. Such an understanding is vital for properly evaluating individual's responses to oppression and honoring their struggles when such honor is appropriate.¹³

Political actions like protest and civil disobedience are undoubtedly essential tools for fighting injustice. However, it is important to recognize that they do not address all manifestations of oppression. Many causes and effects of oppression are embedded in our habits, the dynamics of our relationships, our personal values, and other informal and unlegislated features of daily life.¹⁴ Quiet Resistance is a direct response to the effects of oppression on individuals' personal lives.

It is simply to say that in Quiet Resistance pursuing a blocked project is not intended as a means of engaging others in moral dialogue over injustices.

¹⁰ A similar point is made in Harvey, "Victims, Resistance, and Civilized Oppression", 13.

¹¹ See, for instance, Delmas, *The Duty to Resist*, Kling and Mitchell, *The Philosophy of Protest*, and Brownlee, "Features of a Paradigm Case".

¹² Or other forms of resistance that do not have overtly political aims.

¹³ The dark history of scholarship on resistance makes this especially important. In the past, scholars have failed to recognize the everyday resistance of oppressed populations, taking their alleged lack of resistance to be evidence of their inferiority and contentment with their subjugation. See McGary and Lawson, *Between Slavery and Freedom: Philosophy and American Slavery*, and Baptist *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* for discussion of how historians of slavery denied slave resistance and used this to justify slavery. See Gottlieb, "The Concept of Resistance: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust" for discussion of a parallel trend in historical narratives of the Holocaust.

¹⁴ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 41. A similar point is made in Harvey, "Victims, Resistance, and Civilized Oppression", 14-15.

Thus, it may be better suited for addressing the personal dimensions of oppression than political activism.

Importantly, my aim in exploring Quiet Resistance is not to engage in a theoretical dispute over how to define resistance. Rather, the major aim of this paper is practical. I offer Quiet Resistance as a resource for responding to ethical questions surrounding how to live under circumstances of injustice. Quiet Resistance reveals a greater range of options for responding to oppression than typically considered. Moreover, oppressed persons are differently situated in their means, abilities, and knowledge of oppression. For many people, and certainly the most oppressed, political resistance is not a viable option. It may be too dangerous, counterproductive, or they may lack the necessary resources to engage in it.¹⁵ Quiet Resistance offers a form of resistance that is more accessible and for some more desirable than overt political action.

3. What is Quiet Resistance?

Quiet Resistance is the pursuit of activities that are obstructed by oppression. It is characteristically undertaken for personal reasons as opposed to reasons of justice. The aim of this section is to explain what Quiet Resistance is. I describe the typical features of Quiet Resistance, the motivations of its agents, and the sense in which it is “quiet”. Along the way, I show how Quiet Resistance differs from protest and civil disobedience.

The example of the Wadi Climbers will serve as our central case, but it is worth noting from the outset that Quiet Resistance is a global phenomenon that can take many different forms. During U.S. chattel slavery, an “intense love of knowledge” led the young Frederick Douglass to teach himself how to read against slaveholders’ attempts to keep him illiterate.¹⁶ Today, trans youth in the United States bravely embrace their gender identities in schools where they are bullied and subjected to discriminatory policies. In Egypt, women indulge their passion for motorcycle riding despite misogynistic backlash.¹⁷ Moreover, in Palestine Quiet Resistance takes many forms

¹⁵ For discussion of the costs of resistance see Hay, *Kantianism, Liberalism, and Feminism*, 128.

¹⁶ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 137. See also Fakhoury, “Quiet Resistance: The Value of Personal Defiance”, 406.

¹⁷ *ibid*, 407-408.

apart from rock climbing.¹⁸ Quiet Resistance is a diverse and ubiquitous practice. Once it is named, it is not difficult to find examples.

First and foremost, Quiet Resisters defy oppressive norms or circumstances by pursuing their project. If a person faces no oppression-related obstacles against the pursuit of their project, then they do not engage in Quiet Resistance by pursuing it. Oppression is a system of interconnected social forces and barriers that collectively serve to reduce and immobilize people on the basis of identity (Frye 1983).¹⁹ I use the term ‘project’ in a broad sense to include a wide range of activities, relationships, or values that might matter to a person and occupy her life. They encompass not only finite, goal-directed tasks, but ongoing activities and involvements as well.²⁰ For Palestinians of the Wadi Climbing community, rock climbing is a project that is obstructed by the Israeli apartheid regime. Other examples of projects that may be obstructed by oppression include mentoring black students in a predominantly white institution, preserving indigenous traditions in a context of colonialism, or loving one’s body in a fatphobic society.

There are at least two ways that oppression can obstruct the pursuit of a project. First, the activity itself may be prohibited: anyone who engages in it directly violates an oppressive norm. The project might be illegal according to the laws of an unjust state, or it may be taboo or stigmatized in an oppressive culture. For instance, homosexuality is still criminalized in many countries around the world. In countries where it is legal, there continues to be a social stigma against queer people. Alternatively, oppression can restrict access to the activity. There may be no stigma or prohibition against the project itself, but certain individuals may have to circumnavigate oppression-related barriers, such as policing, physical barricades, or material deprivation, to be able to pursue it. For instance, rock climbing itself does not transgress Israeli law or culture. In fact, Israel is becoming a hotspot for climbing and the crags attract many tourists to the region. However, as we saw in the opening of the paper, Palestinian climbers must surpass police control over their movement in order to pursue their sport simply because they are Palestinian. The two

¹⁸ An anonymous reviewer mentions Palestinian parkour art and theater as other potential arenas for Palestinian Quiet Resistance. See, e.g., Mahmoud, “A Palestinian Theater: Experiences of Resistance, Sumud and Reaffirmation” and The Washington Post Videos, “Displaced Palestinians Practice Parkour”. I would also add *dabke* (a traditional dance) and *tatreez* (embroidery), when pursued for personal reasons.

¹⁹ For in depth discussion of the nature of oppression and oppressive norms see especially Frye, “Oppression”, Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, hooks, “Feminist Theory from Margin to Center”, Manne, *Down Girl* and Hirji, “Oppressive Double Binds”.

²⁰ Moreover, a project need not be something that one achieves or excels at, however one’s engagement with it should not be completely futile. Thus, I am using the term ‘project’ much like Wolf uses it in *The Variety of Values*.

kinds of obstructions – prohibition and access restriction – often work hand in hand, such as when policing serves to enforce unjust laws. Quiet Resisters push back against oppression by pursuing projects that directly violate oppressive norms or by defying oppressive conditions in the course of pursuing their projects. Sometimes, they do both.

The Wadi Climbers challenge the Israeli occupation in several ways by pursuing their sport. They push back against restrictions on their mobility and land access, defy conditions of material deprivation, and opt out of stereotypes regarding the Palestinian identity. Let's begin with how they push back against control of their movement and access to their land.

The United Nations reports that over 700 barriers control Palestinian movement within the West Bank.²¹ The barriers include security checkpoints, roadblocks, trenches, earth mounds, and other physical obstacles which prevent vehicles and pedestrians from traveling freely. The roadblocks “allow Israeli forces to quickly close or open any given area” and “funnel Palestinian traffic towards a restricted number of junctions” where security personnel stop and inspect vehicles.²² In addition, Israel regularly blocks access to the main entrances of Palestinian villages where children have thrown rocks at Israeli military vehicles and where the families of “perpetrators or suspected perpetrators of attacks against Israelis” reside.²³ These closures are carried out irrespective of the suspects' location or where the attacks actually took place. Residents are forced to take long detours or cross roadblocks by foot to reach public transportation and other basic services. Such measures make simple daily tasks for Palestinians a struggle, blocking their access to work, school, and hospitals, as well as disrupting the operations of humanitarian organizations.²⁴ In 2017, the UN Security General stated that such road closures “amount to collective punishment”.²⁵

Given these restrictions on travel, getting to any crag in the West Bank is a struggle. The Wadi Climbers must carry special permits and cross tense security checkpoints where they are stopped, searched, and questioned. Banned from driving on certain roads, they are forced to find alternative routes. When they finally make it to the cliffs, they can be targeted by Israeli settlers and military personnel who harass them and sometimes force them to return home. Regardless, the

²¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Over 700 road obstacles control Palestinian movement within the West Bank”.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

Wadi Climbers refuse to stop climbing. They organize weekly trips at various crags throughout the West Bank. When they are blocked from taking a direct route, they chart alternative paths and invent new ways to get to the cliffs, even when this significantly extends the length of their approach. When they are forced to return home, they come back to climb the next day. The Wadi climbers refuse to be immobilized in a context where their mobility is monitored and severely restricted. Authors of the *Climbing Palestine* guidebook emphasize the significance of movement in climbing, as if to suggest its symbolic value in Palestinian life itself, “climbing is in its essence about movement. Rock climbing moves us through unique environments and takes us to places where we could otherwise not go. By learning how to climb rocks, we expand our freedom of movement”.²⁶

The roadblocks have such a dire effect on Palestinian daily life that many are forced to focus all their attention on the completion of basic tasks (i.e., how will I travel safely to work, school, the hospital, or the grocery store?). Opportunities for recreation are rare, especially since governments and humanitarian organizations typically focus on developing infrastructure, like building new roads and schools.²⁷ As a result, gyms are uncommon and climbing gear can be difficult to access. “Not a lot of people think about what makes life worth living” states the founder of Wadi Climbing, “and that’s, like, having fun, dude!”.²⁸ It is remarkable that under conditions of severe material deprivation the Wadi Climbers find a way to put climbing (a sport which is often considered a luxury) at the center of their lives. The Wadi Climbers radically pursue sport in a context where basic resources, especially for recreation, are scarce.

What’s more, against a backdrop of forced eviction and land confiscation, climbing allows the Wadi community to use their land and create positive experiences with it. This is especially pertinent for climber Laith Alqatami, who comes from a family of farmers. Palestinian farmers in the West Bank are regularly targeted by Israeli settlers. In a recent incident, residents of an illegal settlement “threw stones and fired bullets at farmers” and proceeded to set their cars on fire. The Israeli Army only intervened to protect the settlers from potential counter-attacks.²⁹ In addition to condoning settler violence, Israel regularly confiscates Palestinian farmland in order to divert

²⁶ Burns, Korff, & Moser. *Climbing Palestine*, 4.

²⁷ Bisharat, “Resistance Climbing”.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Mideast Eye, “West Bank: Israeli Settlers Attack Palestinian Farmers and Torch Vehicles”.

natural resources to settlements.³⁰ Climber Alqatami explains how a settlement built in the late 80s has blocked access to his family's farm and cut off his village's supply of irrigation water. This has made it impossible for his family to farm, effectively destroying their entire way of life. "Our land means a lot to us. My family has been working there for hundreds of years, generation after generation. Nowadays it's a different story. There is no access anymore since 2000. Israel worked on this for many years, to make farmers' life impossible. Now most Palestinian farmers have just disappeared".³¹

Climbing is a sport that requires complete physical and mental immersion in the natural landscape. The Wadi Climbers study subtle features of the rock and place safety gear in the walls. To ascend the routes, they grip jagged cracks with their fingers and press their feet firmly onto thin edges. They cheer each other on and shout expletives at the walls. Sometimes after getting to the top of a difficult route, they kiss the rock in awe.³² They use the land to improve their physical and mental strength, and to simply have fun. They create a new relationship with their land and reap its benefits despite Israel's efforts to dispossess them and prevent them from cultivating it.

In addition to defying restrictions on their mobility and land access, climbing also allows Palestinians to opt out of stereotypes about the Palestinian identity that have developed as a reaction to the military occupation. Palestinians are often represented as militant, angry, and belligerent people. Palestinian children, especially boys, are encouraged to throw stones at military units in a symbolic act of national pride and brazen defiance.³³ Such stereotypes are especially resonant for climber Fares Abu Gosh who opted out of militancy in order to pursue a life of climbing. Fares Abu Gosh was named after Fares Odeh, a 12-year-old boy who was shot by Israeli soldiers for throwing a rock at a tank. Despite family pressure to live up to the ideals of martyrdom and political heroism that Odeh has come to symbolize, Abu Gosh refuses to fight. Instead, he wants to climb. "My mom put me into Karate to be more tough because I was such a sissy...we are taught from a very young age to fight back, fight big. Ok... I have never thrown a rock in my life...I was named after a martyr who got killed when he was 12 years old. I don't want to end up like that. My mom says he is a hero, you should be like him. Well... I can't always just be fighting.

³⁰ Amnesty International, "Israel's Occupation: 50 Years of Dispossession".

³¹ Bisharat. "Resistance Climbing".

³² *ibid.*

³³ Macfarlane, "Why Palestinians Throw Stones: A Reporter's Notebook".

I want to live as well. I just want to climb”.³⁴ Against pressures to violently resist the occupation, climbing allows Fares to live a life doing what he truly loves.

Next, let’s consider the motivations that are characteristic of Quiet Resistance. Quiet Resistance is undertaken for personal reasons, rather than reasons of justice. Personal reasons are reasons that arise from an agent’s special attachments to their projects. They are centrally concerned with protecting and promoting the resister’s own special desires and interests or those of the people with whom they stand in personal relationships of love or loyalty. Thus, personal reasons are characteristically partial and agent-relative. They apply to individuals in virtue of special engagements which they may not share with others and which may not be reasonably expected of everyone. Appreciation of a family tradition, loyalty to a spouse, or a passion for rock climbing are examples of personal reasons.³⁵

Personal reasons are to be contrasted with reasons of justice, which arise from an agent’s commitment to promoting justice and just institutions in society writ large. Reasons of justice tend to be concerned with paradigmatically moral matters, such as the difference between right and wrong action, the grounds and limits of our obligations, or protecting and promoting the equally weighted needs and interests of others. Examples of reasons of justice are the desire to incite policy changes, publicly condemn injustices, assist marginalized groups, or fulfill one’s civic duties. Thus, a defining feature of Quiet Resistance is that it is unmistakably motivated by personal reasons, rather than reasons of justice. This is not to say, however, that Quiet Resisters cannot view their actions as having moral value. Indeed, Quiet Resisters *may* accept that their projects are morally good or just – though they might also think of their projects as morally neutral or might not think of their actions in moral terms whatsoever. However, when present, the moral or political value of their actions is typically regarded as a bonus or fortunate side-effect of pursuing their passion rather than their motivating reason for doing it. For a better sense of the personal reasons guiding Quiet Resisters, let’s take a closer look at the Wadi Climbers’ motivations. As it turns out, reasons of justice do not figure strongly in their testimonies.

For Urwah Askar, climbing is a lifestyle to which he is now fully devoted. “Climbing is my life now. It’s the most amazing thing that has happened to me in the last five years. It’s just

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ For further discussion of personal reasons and how they contrast with reasons of justice see Fakhoury, “Violent Resistance as Radical Choice”, 11-16.

very good for me and my heart”.³⁶ The puzzle solving aspect of climbing draws Fares Abu Gosh to the sport. Abu Gosh describes how on his first day of climbing “they told me we have this kind of puzzle you have to fix with your body and I thought that’s fun, that’s fucking fun!”

Inas Radaydeh describes how climbing provides the group with a rare opportunity to focus their attention on something beautiful and separate from the occupation. Palestinians are constantly being reminded of their second-class status. Every aspect of their lives is shaped by the occupation. Climbing allows them to distance themselves from their oppression and experience a feeling of freedom from it. “The inequality, the discrimination, affects every aspect of our lives” she explains. “Especially after Gaza’s war, I wanted to do something to release myself of my thoughts, not think about the occupation, focus on the now, just distract yourself and free your mind”. “Living in a place like Palestine”, fellow climber Laith Alqatami adds, “you really need these moments where you can feel free. Not think about the occupation”.³⁷ In a context where they are always thinking about their oppression and how they will survive it, climbing immerses them in something entirely different and dissociates them from their subjugation. This is personally fulfilling and makes them feel free.

Alqatami elaborates that climbing allowed him to experience a different culture and connect with amazing people, including members of the local shepherding community like Tawfiq Najada, who is now one of the best climbers in Palestine. Many crags in the West Bank are located near Bedouin encampments, and residents are often intrigued by the climbers. Some, like Tawfiq, have become a central part of the climbing community. “I would never have had the chance if not for climbing to meet Bedouins like Tawfiq and to be able to see how they live and get really close to their life. You see things that you never thought that things could be like...just a simple way of life”.³⁸

Muna Aghaalnermer also highlights how climbing has allowed her to connect with a special community of Palestinians from diverse backgrounds, “the people I’ve gotten to know while rock climbing are from different careers, some from the city and some from nearby villages, people who are Christian, people who are Muslim, people who don’t even believe. Different bodies, different strengths...we are a family. We all come from different backgrounds but we all share our

³⁶ Bisharat, “Resistance Climbing”.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*

passion for climbing”.³⁹ Part of what makes for such a bonded community are the conversations that are shared and the narratives that are created at the crag. Inas Radaydeh explains, “as climbers, we share many things at the cliff...our stories, our backgrounds, and our experiences in climbing and in life”.⁴⁰

As we’ve just seen, when asked why they climb, members of the Wadi Climbing community do not assert reasons of justice. On the contrary, some of them are drawn to climbing because it dissociates them from the political struggles that shape their daily lives. Instead of offering reasons of justice, they emphasize attractive features of climbing (e.g., its puzzle solving aspect, how it makes them feel free), their passion for the sport (“it’s fucking fun!”, “it’s my life now”), and the supportive community it provides them. Thus, the Wadi Climbers clearly resist for personal reasons which are characteristic of Quiet Resistance.

To be clear, reasons of justice do not feature in the motivations of the Quiet Resister. One does not engage in Quiet Resistance if they pursue a blocked project because, for instance, they believe it will allow them to make the world a better place, fulfill a civic duty, or assert a conviction about right and wrong – even if they also happen to do it out of love for the project. What defines Quiet Resistance and differentiates it from other forms of resistance is that it is chiefly undertaken for personal reasons, not reasons of justice. This is not to say that someone who pursues a blocked project for *both* personal reasons *and* reasons of justice is not engaged in a valuable form of resistance. Such a person is simply engaged in a different kind of action than what I am calling Quiet Resistance, which precludes motivations of justice. Though I reserve the term Quiet Resistance for cases where the motivations are unmistakably personal, such cases are importantly connected to actions where the agent’s motivations include a mix of personal reasons and reasons of justice. Both defy oppression (at least in part) for reasons of love. As such, they may share certain qualities and merits. In general, I do not mean to say that Quiet Resistance is better or worse than other kinds of resistance, or that its values cannot be shared with other kinds of resistance. Rather, I invented the term Quiet Resistance to highlight actions that are not ordinarily thought of *as resistance*, i.e., to bring proper attention to people who resist oppression despite not attempting to assert moral claims or achieve political goals.⁴¹

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Mainstream philosophical definitions of resistance often disqualify acts that are exclusively motivated by personal reasons from counting as genuine resistance. As a result, Quiet Resistance tends to be overlooked or excluded.

At this point, readers may wonder about the epistemic features of Quiet Resistance. What does a person need to know in order to engage in it? Quiet Resisters must be aware of the specific social pressures against pursuing their project and that they may face backlash for pursuing it. They typically choose to act in spite of that risk. Quiet Resistance does not occur by accident. If someone has no idea that they are defying societal pressure by pursuing their project, then they are not engaged in Quiet Resistance. However, Quiet Resisters do not need to think of their actions as resistance per se. They do not even need to know that they are resisting. They may simply think of themselves as doing something they love or that matters to them. Moreover, they do not need to have a sophisticated understanding of their oppression. For instance, they need not think of themselves as victims of injustice. They need not understand oppression's structural causes. Nor do they have to be able to explain how the barriers they face are connected in a system that works to subordinate their social group. Thus, one need not be highly educated or epistemically privileged in order to engage in Quiet Resistance.

The foregoing discussion allows us to see the sense in which Quiet Resistance is “quiet”, and how it differs from more paradigmatic methods. Consider protest and civil disobedience. Protest is standardly defined as “a mode of address: it is a means of publicly articulating a message about perceived injustice”.⁴² Moreover, as Rawls argues, legal protesters and civil dissents typically act “with the aim of bringing about a change in the law or policies of the government”.⁴³ Brownlee explains that in civil disobedience, “a person seeks to convey her disavowal and condemnation of a law, as well as her dissociation from both the law and the government that enacted it”.⁴⁴ The actions of civil dissidents express “a sincere and serious belief that a law or policy warrants revision” and the desire to convince policymakers to reform it.⁴⁵ As Rawls stresses, in civil disobedience “one does not appeal to principles of personal morality or to religious doctrines...and it goes without saying that civil disobedience cannot be grounded solely on group or self-interest. Instead, one invokes the commonly shared conception of justice that underlies the political order”.⁴⁶ Moreover, since protesters and civil dissidents typically want to persuade others

Examples of such definitions can be found in Cudd's *Analyzing Oppression*, Gottlieb's “The Concept of Resistance” and Reed's *Class Notes*. In Fakhoury, “*Quiet Resistance: The Value of Personal Defiance*”, I first introduced the notion of Quiet Resistance to make the case for a more inclusive definition than is typically assumed in discussions.

⁴² Mitchell & Kling, “Bottles and Bricks: Rethinking the Prohibition Against Violent Political Protest”, 2.

⁴³ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 320.

⁴⁴ Brownlee, “Features of a Paradigm Case”, 345.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, 338.

⁴⁶ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 321.

to accept a certain position, they must consider facts about their audience and whether their message is something that they have the capacity to understand.⁴⁷ This impacts the manner of their resistance (e.g., whether they decide to organize a peaceful rally, put on a boycott, or resort to violence).

By contrast, Quiet Resistance is not a mode of public address. Quiet Resisters do not aim to bring about changes in the state or its policies. Nor are their actions a means of communicating any deeply held moral or political convictions. Indeed, their actions may provide little insight about where they stand on specific moral or political issues. Thus, the adjective “quiet” is only meant to differentiate Quiet Resistance from resistance that is intended to be a mode of public address. Unlike protesters and civil dissidents, Quiet Resisters do not make demands, communicate moral or political convictions, or engage in dialogue over injustices with specific audiences. Their actions need not demonstrate their deeply held moral or political convictions. Nor do they attempt to appeal to the wider community’s sense of justice. Moreover, since Quiet Resisters do not aim to persuade others to accept certain views, the potential reactions of observers are not of direct importance to their project. Public reception may not even cross their mind. While Quiet Resistance may nevertheless have the side-effect of initiating discussion or raising consciousness, this is not its intended aim.

Finally, it is important to note that as a form of resistance, Quiet Resistance is typically costly. Those who engage in it risk receiving oppression-related backlash.⁴⁸ If the pursuit of a project involves no risk of oppression-related backlash, then one is plausibly not engaged in an act of resistance by pursuing it, Quiet Resistance or otherwise.⁴⁹ This is because oppressive norms are held in place by systems of social punishment which serve to deter and censure resisters.⁵⁰ Under the Israeli apartheid, punishment in the form of police violence and control serves to stifle and deter Palestinian resistance. Indeed, peaceful protest and flag waving are criminalized by the regime.⁵¹ Since Quiet Resistance essentially involves defying oppressive norms, and oppressive

⁴⁷ Celikates, “Democratizing Civil Disobedience”, 984.

⁴⁸ Thus, I am assuming a risk condition on resistance: one resists oppression only if one risks receiving oppression-related backlash (i.e., hostility that is caused by or enforces the oppressive norm that one is resisting). See Fakhoury, “Quiet Resistance: The Value of Personal Defiance” for further discussion.

⁴⁹ Fakhoury, “Quiet Resistance: The Value of Personal Defiance”, 411.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Manne, *Down Girl*, 63. Manne argues that “misogyny should be understood as the “law enforcement” branch of a patriarchal order, which has the overall function of *policing* and *enforcing* its governing ideology” through various forms of hostility and aggression.

⁵¹ Braunschweiger, “Witness: How Israel Muzzles Free Expression for Palestinians: 52 Years into Occupation, Peaceful Protest, Waving Flags Still Criminalized”.

norms are held in place by systems of punishment, Quiet Resistance comes with the risk of triggering backlash from oppression's enforcement mechanisms. This is vividly illustrated in the case of the Wadi Climbers, who risk being targeted by Israeli Defense Forces and violent settlers during their climbing excursions.

In sum, Quiet Resistance is the pursuit of projects that are obstructed by oppression. Quiet Resisters act for personal reasons, as opposed to reasons of justice. Their primary aim is to continue engaging with their project in spite of countervailing pressures. Quiet Resistance is "quiet" only in the sense that, unlike protest and civil disobedience, it is not intended to be a mode of public address. Finally, as a form of resistance, Quiet Resistance is characteristically risky. Since it requires defying oppressive norms, it makes the resister vulnerable to backlash from oppression's enforcement mechanisms.

4. What is the Value of Quiet Resistance?

With an understanding of Quiet Resistance, we can now turn to the question of its value. Philosophers highlight two potentially overlapping ways in which resistance may be valuable. First, as a form of direct action, resistance can have positive effects on lessening oppression. Second, as a form of symbolic action, resistance may exhibit important values and moral attitudes. In this section, I consider what can be said in favor of the positive effects and symbolic value of Quiet Resistance. As a form of direct action, Quiet Resistance may weaken oppressive conventions, raise consciousness, and allow victims to maintain their connections with sources of meaning in life that are being undermined by their oppression. The symbolic significance of Quiet Resistance may vary depending on the case. Generally speaking, a kind of self-respect consisting of properly valuing one's projects may be exhibited. In the particular case of Palestinian climbers in the West Bank, climbing is a means of symbolically reconnecting Palestinians with their rightful land. That is, the Wadi Climbers symbolically repossess their land by climbing it.

Quiet Resistance as Direct Action

When considering the value of any resistance practice, it is natural first to consider its effectiveness in lessening oppression. Some resistance practices can effectively end or hinder oppressive harms.

For instance, saboteurs may halt the production of chemical weapons. Protesters can directly confront police. Victim testimonials can warn others of potential danger and initiate legal investigation. Boycotts can create disruptions that pressure officials to address neglected issues. What might Quiet Resistance do to halt or hinder oppression?

One possibility is that when practiced en masse and over time, Quiet Resistance may weaken the grip that oppressive customs have on society. Philosophers emphasize that oppression is perpetuated by mass participation in oppressive practices. As Young explains, “its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules”.⁵² Cudd holds that, “by participating in an oppressive institution, one lends some strength and stability to it, perhaps even legitimizes it to some degree”.⁵³ By contrast, widespread defiance of an oppressive norm may weaken oppression and make it appear illegitimate. As Terlazzo states, it could “lead to a situation in which no firm norm holds” or alternatively, “a new, non-oppressive norm would likely take its place”.⁵⁴ Perhaps wide-spread Quiet Resistance may reduce oppression over time. Put simply, the more that people engage in projects that are obstructed by oppression, the weaker the obstructions against those projects may become, resulting in an overall reduction of harm.

While it is not impossible that Quiet Resistance could have such an effect, I am pessimistic about the chances. It is extremely unlikely that individuals acting alone without political intentions could dismantle wide-reaching oppressive norms. For instance, it would be naïve to think that if more Palestinians take up climbing or other unconventional projects, this will lead Israel to weaken its oppressive policies against Palestinians. Lessening oppression writ large requires organized collective action, strong political leadership, and the execution of clearly stated political aims that are not characteristic of Quiet Resistance.

It is more likely for Quiet Resistance to have the positive effect of raising consciousness. People may not be aware of an oppressive condition until they witness someone challenge or defy it. Indeed, news stories and a recent film showcasing the Wadi Climbers have served to draw international attention to the Palestinian cause and raise awareness of the Israeli occupation. Moreover, Terlazzo has argued that defying oppressive norms can help bystanders “recognize and

⁵² Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 41.

⁵³ Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 199.

⁵⁴ Terlazzo, “(When) Do Victims have Duties to Resist Oppression?”, 406.

challenge the internalized or unrecognized elements of those norms, thereby expanding ambitions and behaviors more locally”.⁵⁵ In addition to raising awareness of oppression, norm defiers, like Quiet Resisters, can model alternatives to oppressive norms, “thereby providing others with additional live options from which to choose the course of their own lives”.⁵⁶ Observing the Quiet Resistance of others may inspire one to take up unconventional projects of one’s own. For instance, the Wadi Climbers have inspired many other Palestinians, like Tawfiq Najada, to take up climbing.

It is important to note that raising consciousness and weakening oppressive norms are, at best, side-effects of Quiet Resistance. This is because Quiet Resisters act primarily for personal reasons, not for reasons of justice. Lessening oppressive norms and raising consciousness are not their primary aims. Unlike protest and civil disobedience, Quiet Resistance is not necessarily a public act. It may even be done secretly or in private, with no witnesses to reap its benefits. An account of the value of Quiet Resistance should capture its deeply personal nature. Thus, we should also look to the effects it has on the lives of the people who engage in it.

Philosophers have argued that a person’s projects may form part of their identity and what one “takes seriously at the deepest level, as what [their] life is about”.⁵⁷ Our projects pull us outside of ourselves and provide us “with reasons to live and to care about the world”.⁵⁸ Pursuing our projects is vital to living a meaningful life. As Wolf holds, a meaningful life is one in which a person is “engaged in projects (or a project) of positive value”.⁵⁹ It is a life in which a person “cares fairly deeply” about such a project(s) and “is able to do something positive” about it, “to create it, protect it, promote it, honor it, or more generally, to actively affirm it in some way or other”.⁶⁰ From a personal point of view, Quiet Resistance allows people to pursue the projects that matter to them, oppression notwithstanding. Insofar as it allows victims to maintain and stay connected to their projects, Quiet Resistance may be conducive to living a meaningful life under conditions of oppression.

Quiet Resistance as Symbolic Action

⁵⁵ *ibid*, 407.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 391.

⁵⁷ Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism”, 116.

⁵⁸ Wolf, *The Variety of Values*, 158.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 94.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, 253, 256.

Another approach to thinking about the value of resistance is to consider its symbolic significance. What values or attitudes does the act of resistance convey, independently of its consequences? A prominent line in the literature focuses on the way protest can convey the self-respecting attitudes of resisters. For instance, Hill and Boxill argue that protesting injustice exhibits recognition self-respect, a kind of self-respect consisting in understanding and properly valuing one's moral rights.⁶¹ On Hill's view, systematically acting as if one's moral convictions were nonexistent or insignificant displays a morally problematic attitude of servility.⁶² However, being disposed to resist violations of morality by "express[ing] openly one's unwillingness to condone, support, or imitate unjust practices" exhibits proper self-respect.⁶³ Likewise, Boxill argues that "persons have reason to protest their wrongs not only to stop injustice but also to show self-respect".⁶⁴ Where non-resistance "shakes [one's] confidence in his self-respect" and, over time, may erode it, protesting violations of one's rights is "an excellent way of confirming that one has faith in one's worth".⁶⁵

I agree with Hill and Boxill that resistance may exhibit attitudes of self-respect. However, recognition self-respect – which consists of understanding and properly valuing one's rights – may not be fundamental to Quiet Resistance. It is important to distinguish between the different kinds of self-respect that can be expressed in different forms of resistance. The kind of self-respect that is involved in an act of resistance crucially depends on the reasons that motivate the action. While recognition self-respect may be exhibited in acts of protest that are motivated by reasons of justice, different forms of self-respect seem to be exhibited when resistance is motivated by other considerations. For instance, if one resists to show their strength and prowess, then this is likely an expression of appraisal self-respect – i.e., respect for one's special merits, achievements, and excellent qualities. Alternatively, if one resists as a means of pursuing a beloved vocation, then their action may exhibit a kind of self-respect consisting in having and properly valuing one's personal projects. Someone with this kind of self-respect regards themselves as a bearer of valuable projects which they have strong reason to pursue, even when doing so is challenging or difficult. They regard their projects as an important part of their lives and are motivated to stick to them

⁶¹ Hill, "Servility and Self-Respect" and "Symbolic Protest and Calculated Silence". Boxill, "Self-Respect and Protest". The terms "recognition respect" and "appraisal respect" are from Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect".

⁶² Hill, "Servility and Self-Respect", 97.

⁶³ Hill, "Symbolic Protest and Calculated Silence", 98.

⁶⁴ Boxill, "Self-Respect and Protest", 59.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, 66.

despite countervailing pressures. This last form of self-respect—respect for oneself as a bearer of worthy projects—may be fundamental to most cases of Quiet Resistance.

However, Quiet Resistance may exhibit attitudes other than self-respect. What those attitudes are will be highly particular to the case. Perhaps climbing allows members of the Wadi Community to reconnect with a land that is rightfully theirs. The Wadi Climbers symbolically repossess their land by climbing it. As discussed in Alqatami’s testimony, Israel regularly prevents Palestinians from using their land, for instance, by confiscating farmland and destroying the livelihoods of Palestinian farmers. However, climbing is a sport that requires land-use. Not only must climbers bolt safety gear into the cliffs, but climbing requires reading the rock and learning to use one’s body to ascend its features. Against efforts to prevent them from cultivating their land, Palestinian climbers use it for their enjoyment and to improve their mental and physical strength. They forge a new relationship with their land by carefully studying its topography and integrating their bodies with it. This constitutes a profound symbolic connection between Palestinians and their land. The Wadi Climbers’ Quiet Resistance exhibits an attitude that says, roughly, “this land is ours to enjoy, it is not strictly for Israeli use”. As Alqatami explains, “it’s a way of proving it is our land when we all get together and go climb at the crag”⁶⁶

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explain the notion of Quiet Resistance and explore its value. Quiet Resistance is the pursuit of activities that are obstructed by oppression. It is characteristically undertaken for personal reasons as opposed to reasons of justice. When explaining why they resist, Quiet Resisters typically cite their love for the activity or features about it that make it valuable to them despite the costs of pursuing it. Quiet Resistance is “quiet” only because, unlike paradigms of protest and civil disobedience, it is not intended as a mode of public address. Quiet Resisters are primarily interested in pursuing their project, rather than asserting their deeply held moral convictions. As a form of direct action, Quiet Resistance may weaken oppressive norms, raise consciousness, and allow those who engage in it to maintain sources of meaning in life. As a form of symbolic action, Quiet Resistance may exhibit different values, including a certain kind of self-respect. For the most part, its symbolic significance will be highly particular to the case. In the

⁶⁶ Bisharaat. “Resistance Climbing”.

central example of the paper, Quiet Resistance is a means of symbolically reconnecting Palestinians with their rightful land. That is, the Wadi Climbers symbolically repossess their land by climbing it.⁶⁷

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